

What Do You Want, Really?

Park Avenue Christian Church

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Mark 10:47-52

This morning I want to start another little conversation with us, as we think about our ministry together and this new beginning at 1010 Park Avenue, I want to share a series of sermons over the next few weeks that I am calling Hard Questions of the Heart. There are some hard questions, hard questions that will not give way to easy, simplistic platitudes, thoughtless, throw-away answers, but require us to pause, ponder and plumb the depths of our hearts.

And the question I raise this morning as we launch this series, hard questions of the heart, what do you want, really? What do you really want? What are you asking God for? What are you asking of yourself? What are you praying for, hoping for, living for, working for, really? Not what I say I want; not what I publicly and profusely profess and proclaim I want; not what I think the prescriptions of propriety dictate I should want. But what do I want, really. What is really the desire of my heart? It is not an easy question to get an answer to.

But I want to suggest this morning that getting an answer to this question is the key to unlocking your life and the key to getting on with our work here at 1010 Park Avenue. It is the question we must wrestle with and answer as a community of faith. For life has a way of granting the real requests, the true desires of our hearts. We see this clearly in the text before us today, the healing of the blind man Bartimaeus.

The account of this healing is found in the three synoptic gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke. However according to Matthew chapter 20 there are two blind men at the outskirts of Jericho who cry out to Jesus. And the 18th chapter of Luke tells us of the prayer of one blind man for sight on the edge of the city of Jericho. The text from Mark alone gives us the name of the blind man who prayed. Did these early Christians know him by name because he had become a member of the Society of the Resurrection, the church of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ? We do not know, but we do know that Mark calls the man by name, Bartimaeus.

Those who read all three of these accounts, in Matthew, Mark and Luke, will find more than one interesting detail. Each account brings a chapter to a close. This may mean that this pleading and the Savior's heeding formed a splendid clinching, climatic account in Christian preaching. This is particularly likely if the New Testament was first used as preaching material by the early church and then was later committed to written form.

And another interesting detail on which one need not stumble is that Matthew places this request and the Savior's reply as happening while Jesus and his disciples were leaving Jericho. Mark and Luke on the other hand suggest that it happened as Jesus approached the city. But when you think about it, what difference does it really make? Entering or leaving, the Bible says that Jesus heard the cry, turned to heed the need and blessed the man or two men as Jesus entered Jericho or as he left Jericho. Coming in or going out! What does it matter, other than that it happened! In each of the cases, Matthew with his two people, as Jesus was leaving Jericho or Mark and Luke with their one person as Jesus was arriving in the city, the desire was the same, "Lord that I may receive my sight."

Jesus is nearing the end of his earthly ministry in this account. He knows that for himself the end is near. All of his miracles and healings and teachings and talk about the kingdom of God put him on a collision course with the religious establishment. He knows the end is near. And so he makes his way to Jerusalem to keep his date with destiny. But on the way he passes through the town of Jericho about 15 miles east of Jerusalem, down the main road right through Jericho. And whenever a distinguished Rabbi or teacher passed through it was the custom that people would surround him and listen to him hanging on his every word, while he walked and talked. This was very common in that day. And no doubt on this particular day there were more people than usual in Jericho because many others were also headed to Jerusalem for the celebration of the Passover Feast.

And so there all kinds of folks surrounding Jesus, many eager and curious to catch a glimpse of this audacious young Galilean who had stood up against the assembled might of the orthodox religious establishment. Can't you picture this crowd? People standing, straining and stretching on tiptoe trying to catch a glimpse, to hear a word and at one of the gates to the city, the northern or southern gate depending on whether Jesus was entering or leaving the city, there sat a blind beggar, Bartimaeus. He heard the trampling of feet. He asked what was happening and who was passing.

And maybe someone in the crowd said to him, it's a man named Jesus of the house of David. He has been doing some miraculous things for people. He caused the daughter of Jarius to live again. He fed five thousand people with one little boy's lunch. He healed ten lepers. He healed and quieted the spirit of wild man named Legion who lived in the cemetery. He caused deaf people to hear and he has even caused the blind to see.

Well, this is the best news Bartimaeus has ever heard. Hope begins to rise in his heart, a desire to meet this Jesus takes possession of him and he begins to feel the thrill of a new expectancy and he starts crying in a loud voice, Jesus, son of David have mercy on me. Other folk look around at him like he's crazy and they tell him to shut up and keep quiet. We can't hear Jesus for you, but Bartimaeus

cries even louder again and again...”Jesus, Son of David have mercy on me.” The stares and jeers of the people could not quiet him. No one was going to take from him his chance to escape this world of darkness. He cried with such violence and persistence that the procession stopped and he was brought to Jesus. And Jesus turned and said to the man, what do you want me to do for you? And the blind man said, “Lord that I may receive my sight.”

Of all of our physical faculties, we probably cherish the ability to see the most. We would rather lose our hearing or our ability to speak, or maybe even an arm or a leg if we had to make that kind of a choice than to be without sight. We can feel with this man in his desperate cry as we can feel with, and admire, some of the dearest people we know who have walked so gallantly into the darkness of physical sightlessness. I do not say it lightly, but may it not be that some of us who enjoy physical sight are in a still more desperate condition if we have no spiritual vision?

As Jesus said of the disciples one day to have eyes, but see not. To have ears, but hear not. To be without spiritual vision; to have sight, but no insight, that is a condition that is far worse. The Apostle Paul said of the people in the church at Corinth that “their minds were blind.” Now that’s really tragic, for a blind mind is a closed mind and a closed mind shrinks the soul, hardens the heart, chills faith and destroys hope. We could have perfect 20/20 vision and still not see. We are blind when we can see clearly the faults and failures of others, but can’t see our own. We are blind when we cannot see the good, worth and value of every person. We are blind when we can’t see ourselves as we really are.

You know we often carry a false notion of what we look like spiritually as we do of what we look like physically. Physically, some of us think sometimes we look like the models in the ads. I know some people who would not put on the clothes they do if they really knew how they looked in them. I have seen some men with bad feet trying to wear western heels and ladies in outfits who should have picked up their money and run from the counters where such clothing was being sold. Some of us think we are witty when we are only nasty, correct when we are only corrupt, brilliant when we are only vulgar, smart when we are only stupid. We need to see ourselves as we really are. This man wanted to see. His was a prayer not only for physical sight, but for spiritual vision and he was going to let nothing stop him from seeing. He had a desire that was born of a demand, a need to see.

My dear friends I believe God wants to do a great work in us and through us in the place. I really believe that. I believe that every pew in here could be filled to overflowing. I believe that we have something to offer the world that people will beat the doors down to get here. This is what we proclaim: “We defend no doctrine but Christ; we preach no gospel but love; we have no purpose but to serve.” Wow! I believe this city is crying out for a community of faith like that. A true and authentic community that is open and affirming of all of God’s children,

no fight here about who is in or out....everybody is welcomed to this Table! A community of faith that is spiritually centered and socially connected, progressive and responsible. People are hungry for it. But we have got to see it and claim it as our work. Soren Kierkegaard, the Danish theologian shares the parable of a man passing through a village and noticing a sign in front of a shop that said, "pressing done here." The man went home and got his clothes and brought them back to the shop for pressing, only to be disappointed in finding out that pressing was not done there, just the sign was for sale. The question for us, are we doing the work or are we just making beautiful signs? Is there is a reality behind our sign?

Let me tell you this, attitude will determine the multitude. It is the theological aptitude or the denominational bias, nor the location of the building or even the size of the population. It is attitude! We have got to want to grow! Some people say that want to grow, but they don't really want to grow! Because to grow means being open, open to new people, new ideas, new worship patterns, new cultural patterns, new seating arrangements, new power arrangements.

In other words, we have got to have a desire born of a demand. For how can we expect a supply if there is no demand. If we are to experience the power of God in our work, then we have got to have a need, a demand. God doesn't waste God's power. God gives power to those who have need/ demand, those who are up against something, those who have tackled something so big, beautiful and bold, so overwhelming, so great that their own resources are insufficient, that they can't see their way out, God has to come in and see you through. And so if we do not know the power of God in our lives, it could be that our demand, our need is not great enough. What is it that really want to do here, maintenance or ministry? Do we want to just survive or do we really want to thrive by getting healthy and being a beacon of life, light and hope in this community and beyond?

But listen not only do we see need and demand, but this blind man was also desperate. Listen to his cry, Jesus, son of David have mercy on me! And this cry is no calm, restrained, polite request. It is so strident, so insistent, so piercing, so loud in volume and intense in tone that it offends the great majority of those who stand around. They tried to calm the man down, but he keeps on crying. He was desperate because his need was great. Maybe the allowance ought to be made that those who feel little need of the Savior are likely to be able to think and speak in calmer, more restrained, respectable tones. One would not want to press this too far, for empty wagons can make much noise and enthusiasm can sometimes be nothing but a mask for an unstable personality. Also, still water can run very deep and there are those whose relationship to the Lord is intense and vital and who in their silence experience the noblest and richest communion with God.

On the other hand, many who feel the need of the Lord only slightly are likely to worship him only slightly and their cry, their petition to him, is likely to be slight

and formal. Such people are likely to be impatient with the urgency, the passion, the warmth, the enthusiasm, the intensity with which others must call out to the Lord.

Bartimaeus had no small need. His cry was loud, boisterous if you want to call it that, unbecoming if you want to say that. Yes, vulgar if you must go that far. The man's need was large, so he called out, hollered out. He was desperate. "Jesus, thou son of David, have mercy on me." This indecorum, this coarseness, this ill mannered loudness on the part of Bartimaeus drew not only disapproving glances but signals of the hand and calls for him to be quiet. The Scriptures say that Bartimaeus cried out still louder. He was desperate! And I say to you if you are sincerely calling on God or worshipping God or praising God, "don't let anybody turn you around.

Many of us would cry more earnestly if we knew how alarming is our case. And if more of us knew how bad our condition, we would cry more desperately, "Jesus, thou son of David, have mercy on me." The pain of our guilt and wrong would stop us from pointing the finger at others. On me! On me! It's not my brother, it's not my sister, but it's me O Lord standing in the need of prayer, runs that old spiritual. If we realized what crawling evils we have allowed to find a home in us, we would surely cry out desperately.

And I tell you it is only a desperate determined desire that really gets things done. How badly do we want what we say we want? How desperate are we? But not only in this miracle is there a demand and a desperation, but there is also a dependence here. When Jesus called the man, he threw off his coat. It was one of the few possessions that he had. It no doubt provided comfort and security, but he got rid of it. The coat no doubt weighted him down and held him back. He threw it off and came to Jesus. He depended. He trusted. He took Jesus at his word. And when the man came to Jesus, Jesus said to him go your way, your faith has made you whole and immediately the man received his sight and followed Jesus in the way. He became a follower, a disciple of Jesus.

God's power was set in motion by this simple act of obedient faith. So it will be for us, a demand we cannot supply leads to a desperation we cannot solve which leads to a dependence we cannot substitute which leads to a deliverance we cannot stop!!

What do you want, really? It is a hard question of the heart. And if you can struggle with it and answer, it makes living easier. I don't know about you this morning, but I have determined that what I want is to see. I want to see you Park Avenue. I want to see this city. I want to see the needs around us in this community. I want to see myself as I am. But most of all, I want to see Jesus! Nobody else will do. I want to see Jesus. I love my parents, my father who is gone on home to glory and my mother who just celebrated this past week her

85th birthday, I love them dearly, but when my soul is overwhelmed I need to see Jesus.

Nobody else understands my condition like Jesus. He knows all about me. He knows when I am right and he knows when I am wrong. He knows all about my struggles and he will guide till the day is done. I want to see Jesus. Take all the world, but give me Jesus. When my soul is cast down, I don not want to see anybody but Jesus. I need someone who can tell me go in peace and sin no more. I want to see Jesus!

Not Moses for he says I must be clean to come to the mercy seat. Not Socrates, for he tells me I must have knowledge to reach the *Summum Bonum*, the absolute good. Not Buddha, for he tells me I must give up all that is material before I may enter life. Not John the Baptist, for he tells me I must bring fruits worthy of repentance.

But my best fruit is often times defected and diseased. Give me Jesus! He alone says, if any person thirst, let them come and drink and they who come, I will in way cast them out. Whosoever will let them come! Never mind preacher your silver tongued eloquence. I must see Jesus! Never mind preacher your vestments and your scholarship, I must see Jesus! He alone lets me say: "Just as I am with, without one plea, but that thy blood was shed for me and that thou biddest me come to thee. O lamb of God I come. I come."

Jesus is passing through our Jericho on his way to the New Jerusalem to be crowned King of Kings. Cry now my soul, have mercy on me and he will stop and meet us at the point of our need. That is if that is what we want, really. Amen.